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# <sup>135</sup> Aging Issues and Answers

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**Question:** I am currently caring for an elderly relative and I could really use some help balancing the demands of working and caregiving, where can I find it?

**Answer:** First of all, it's important for you to know that you are not alone in this situation. Family caregivers play a large and crucial role in taking care of older adults and adults with disabilities. A recent study by the AARP estimated that in 2006, approximately 560,000 South Carolinians provided direct care and/or financial support to an older relative. The estimated value of that care was \$5.5 billion dollars, according to the report. Copies of the AARP study, "Valuing the Invaluable: A New Look at the Economic Value of Family Caregiving," can be obtained on the Internet at [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org).

Every day, those South Carolina caregivers provide unpaid help to adult family members and friends (usually parents or grandparents) who can no longer do many of the basic daily tasks that most of us take for granted. We know that

when caregivers take care of themselves, they are better able to fulfill the critical role they play in caring for others, and we owe them as much support as we can provide. Supporting our caregivers is the basic goal of a very important program coordinated by the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging.

The South Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program provides a source of help and support to caregivers through trained advocates located in the 10 regional Area Agency on Aging offices throughout the state. The program was established in 2002 through federal legislation passed to support unpaid family caregivers who provide most of the long-term care in the United States. The Lt. Governor's Office on Aging works with Area Agencies on Aging and community and local service provider organizations to provide family caregiver support services including:

- Information on existing community resources and programs.
- One-on-one counseling, support and assistance in gaining access to services
- Support groups.
- Caregiver education and training.
- Respite care to allow caregivers to take a short break from their caregiving

responsibilities.

- Supplemental services to complement the care provided by caregivers. These services may include incontinence supplies, chore or homemaker services, emergency response monitoring, nutritional supplements, assistive technology, transportation, or home modifications such as grab bars or wheelchair ramps.

People eligible for the services provided by the South Carolina Family Caregiver Support program include anyone caring for an adult family member age 60 or older, or anyone caring for an Alzheimer's patient of any age. Adults age 55 and older who are caring for a child with a disability and grandparents age 60 or over who are caring for grandchildren younger than age 18 can also receive services through this program.

For more information about the Family Caregiver Support Program and the services available in your area, contact the Family Caregiver Advocate in the regional Area Agency on Aging organization that serves your county. You can also call the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging in Columbia at 1-800-868-9095 for a referral to your local advocate.